

How the CNP, a Republican Powerhouse, Helped Spawn Trumpism, Disrupted the Transfer of Power, and Stoked the Assault on the Capitol

By Anne Nelson

ON JANUARY 6, 2021, A STUNNED NATION WATCHED as protesters stormed the Capitol to prevent the certification of the electoral votes from the November election. The effort failed, but not without shining a harsh light on the fault lines of American democracy.

In the weeks that followed, analysts have struggled to define how much of the incursion was the spontaneous result of a “riot”—or a “peaceful protest” gone wrong—and how much was the result of a planned operation.

One major player in the events leading up to the assault on the Capitol was the Council for National Policy, an influential coalition of Christian conservatives, free-market fundamentalists, and political activists. Over the previous year the CNP and its members and affiliates organized efforts to challenge the validity of the election, conspired to overturn its results, and tried to derail the orderly transfer of power. This is an account of the measures they took, leading up to the deadly January 6 insurrection.

The Council for National Policy was founded in 1981 by a group of televangelists, Western oligarchs, and Republican strategists to capitalize on Ronald Reagan’s electoral victory the previous year. From the beginning, its goals represented a convergence of the interests of these three groups: a retreat from advances in civil and political rights for women and minorities, tax cuts for the wealthy, and raw

political power. Operating from the shadows, its members, who would number some 400, spent the next four decades courting, buying, and bullying fellow Republicans, gradually achieving what was in effect a leveraged buyout of the GOP. Favorite sons, such as Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, were groomed, financed, and supported. Apostates, such as John McCain and Jeff Flake, were punished and exiled. The leaders of the CNP tended to favor their conservative Christian co-religionists, but political expedience came first.

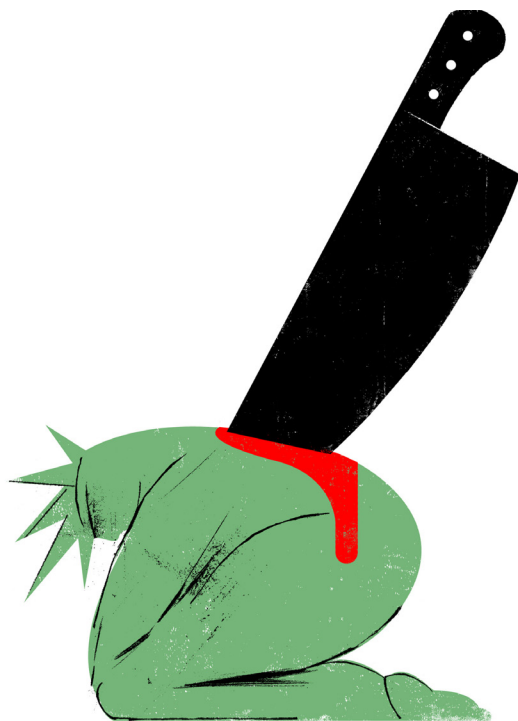
In 2016, the CNP put its partners’ money, data, and ground game behind Donald Trump, as the ultimate transactional candidate. Trump promised it retrograde social policies, a favorable tax regime, regulatory retreats, and its choice of federal judges. He delivered in spades. By 2020, the leaders of the CNP were

ready to go to extreme lengths to keep him—and themselves—in power.

Over the final year of the Trump presidency, the CNP took center stage. By January 2020, its leading figures had become sought-after guests on talk shows and frequent visitors to the White House. Many of its stated goals had been advanced. By March, the Republican Senate had confirmed more than 185 of Trump’s conservative nominees for the federal bench. All but eight of the judges had ties to the Federalist Society, headed by longtime CNP members Eugene Meyer and Leonard Leo. Two of the CNP’s favored Supreme Court nominees, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, had been confirmed. The court was only one justice away from a conservative majority, and the CNP had its eye on the seat held by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. With a second term

in office and normal attrition, Trump could decisively tilt the federal courts, opening the door for a massive overhaul of the American legal framework.

Many initiatives that were pending in the courts had been addressed by fiat. Trump rolled back scores of environmental regulations created to protect air quality, potable water supplies, and wildlife, as a quid pro quo for the support he received from CNP’s favored oil and gas interests. His administration decimated the budgets and personnel of federal agencies assigned to protect public health, public safety, and public lands, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, and the National Park Service, to the benefit of



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corporations and extractive industries. There was also notable progress on CNP's social agenda, with the erosion and rollback of the rights of LGBT populations, women, and minorities in the courts and state legislatures.

The CNP's plutocrats were pleased with what they had wrought. The "tax reform" enacted by Trump and the Republican Senate concentrated ever greater wealth in the hands of America's most affluent individuals through tax cuts for corporations and the rich, driving income inequality to the highest levels in 50 years. The country's tax revenues as a share of gross domestic product plummeted, and budget gaps widened, but Republicans—who had made a career of loudly condemning deficit spending—remained mute as long as the measures benefited the moneyed class instead of those who needed help. Donald Trump remained a dependable ally, asking only for an audience for his megalomania and a free pass for the business interests of the "Trump brand." In return, he delivered his dynamism and his unshakeable base. This state of affairs was so satisfactory that the Republican Party decided not to bother drafting a new party platform for the 2020 election. Instead, it recycled the 2016 platform, which included former CNP President Tony Perkins's drafts opposing marriage equality and promoting conversion therapy.

Ultimate realization of the CNP's agenda depended on winning a second term for Trump in November. With another four years, it could enshrine its socially regressive policies on the federal level, further blur the line between church and state, and consolidate huge windfalls for corporations and wealthy individuals. As of January 1, electoral prospects looked sweet. The Republicans' strongest suit was the economy. Massive tax cuts had flooded corporations with cash, which, as critics of the tax bill had predicted, they used to buy back their stock and drive up share prices 28 percent in 2019. This boosted Trump's popularity among the 55 percent of Americans who reported owning stocks, but did little to spur the growth Republicans had promised would offset the soaring deficits.

On the tactical front, it seemed as though the Trump team had found a winning formula. Ralph Reed, a member of the CNP's board of governors (also known as a central figure in the scandal involving disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff), continued to employ his Faith and Freedom Coalition and its partner, United in Purpose, to get out the vote

Trump's reelection strategy rested on a thriving economy, as well as mass rallies and in-church recruitment.

among conservative white Christians in critical swing states, expanding their targeting from evangelicals to Catholics.

The coalition's data and app development also advanced. The uCampaign apps developed by Thomas Peters had served their purpose in the 2016 and 2018 elections, but they were due for an upgrade. In late 2019, word began to circulate that Trump's campaign manager, Brad Parscale, was preparing to release the [Trump 2020 app](#), a component of what he labeled a "juggernaut campaign." Parscale had quietly taken over Trump's digital operations and planned to use the new app as part of a broader strategy. Trump 2020 was designed to leverage uCampaign features such as gamification (awarding points and prizes for participating in campaign activities and sharing contacts). It also expanded the use of geolocation devices to recruit and harvest data from attendees of Trump rallies.

The crowds, energized by Trump's live performances, would be invited to download the app and recruit others across their social networks. The rallies were a crucial component of the campaign. The more outrageous Trump's rhetoric on the podium, the more earned media coverage he received. In contrast, the Democrats were still in disarray, with a dozen primary candidates competing for fragmented press coverage and no clear front-runner.

Then, on January 20, 2020, doctors diagnosed the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the United States.

The patient was a man who had just returned to Snohomish County, Washington, from a family visit to Wuhan, China. The virus spread across Washington State, then ravaged New York City and New Orleans. The first U.S. Covid death was reported as occurring on February 6. On February 20, the global stock market went into a free fall that didn't abate until April. Bloomberg News called it the Great Coronavirus Crash.

Trump's reelection strategy rested on a thriving economy, as well as mass rallies and in-church recruitment. Now public health officials were urging lockdowns that would derail both the economy and the gatherings. Trump's CNP supporters stepped up to the plate.

The CNP's meetings had long featured briefings on forthcoming elections by members and allies, followed by a memorandum containing a series of "Action Steps." The October 2018 meeting's [action steps](#), for example, called for members to

Continued on page 13, POWERHOUSE

NOTEWORTHY TEXTS

The Reverend William Barber II, the civil rights leader who is considered the heir to Martin Luther King Jr., was asked by President Biden and Vice President Harris to deliver the homily at the Inaugural prayer breakfast, held at the National Cathedral on January 21. The following is the text of his sermon.

Lord, please help, hold and harness us for Your purposes and for Your glory. Amen.

Our text this morning comes from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 58. It begins,

This is the kind of fast day I'm after:
to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed, cancel debts.
What I'm interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad.

And it ends, saying:

If you get rid of unfair practices,
quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people's sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness....
You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.
You'll be known as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again.

The text this morning is from the prophet Isaiah. But the prophet, being able to see the future, may have taken his text from the old chitlin' circuit comic, Moms Mabley, who used to tell what one strawberry said to the other strawberry: "If we hadn't been in that bed together, we wouldn't be in this jam today."

Well, we are in a jam today. Trouble is real, and whether we like it or not, we are in this mess together as a nation.

When this word of the Lord came to Isaiah, his people were also in a jam. Bad leadership, greed, and injustice and lies had led them into trouble, exile, and economic hardship.

In that day, some tried to simply cover up the trouble with false religion and deceit. But God said to the prophet, "Sound the trumpet. Tell the nation of its sin. Tell them that just going through the motions of prayer will not get them out of this jam. I need them to repent of what got them here and turn in a new direction."

The prophet was saying what Jesus would say about nations

caring for the least of these.

The prophet was saying then what Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in the 1930s to an America with one-third of the nation "ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished," besieged by the Great Depression and beset by bigotry and hatred. At such a time as this, FDR said:

"The rest of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

Isaiah was saying what Dr. King said to America when we faced a jam in the 1960s:



Rev. William J. Barber II

The time has come for an all-out world war against poverty. The rich nations must use their vast resources of wealth to develop the underdeveloped, school the unschooled, and feed the unfed. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation.

The prophet's basic question to the leadership of his day was the question the economist Joseph Stiglitz has asked: not how much will it cost the government to address inequality, but how much has it cost us not to?

It is the truth Aretha Franklin pointed to when she sang,

Wholly Holy

Come together

We have got to come together

We can rock this earth's foundation

Holler love across the nation

We proclaim love, our salvation

Yes we can.

And so the prophet gives the nation God's clear guidance out of the jam it is in. Choose first to repent of the policy sin. Then, repair the breach.

The breach, according to the imagery of Isaiah, is when there is a gap in the nation between what is and how God wants things to be.

Transposed to our time, the breach is when we say "One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" with our lips while we see the rich and the poor living in two very different Americas.

The breach would be knowing the only way to ensure domestic tranquility is to establish justice, but pretending we can address the nation's wounds with simplistic calls for unity.

The breach is telling lies when we need truth, greed when we need compassion, fighting one another when we need to find common ground, and hating when we ought to be loving.

And every now and then, a nation needs breach repairers to take us forward.

[Mr. President](#), you have known the breach of economic struggle in your childhood and the breach of a broken heart.

[Madame Vice President](#), you have known the political and social breach caused by racism that tried to place a breach between the intelligence you had and the school you could attend. Your mother fought and organized because she knew this nation's breach. And both of you know that the only way forward is for breaches to be repaired.

This moment in our nation is not about left, right, or centrist. It should not be about Republicans and Democrats. Even what [we saw happen at the Capitol two weeks](#) ago is the result of a long history—a politics of division that was cynically named “positive polarization” by those who thought they could use it for their own political advantage. This strategy of feeding and seeding intentional racial and class divisions into the body politic spilled over into the inevitable violence that ideas of supremacy always produce.

If we want to come out of this jam and move forward together, we cannot accept the racial disparities, violence, and breaches that impact Black, brown, Native and Asian Americans while offering collateral damage to our poor white brothers and sisters and ultimately our entire democracy.

We can't accept the poverty and low wealth of 140 million Americans before Covid-19 and many more millions since. We must have a Third Reconstruction. We must address the five interlocking injustices of [systemic racism](#), poverty, ecological devastation/denial of health care, the war economy, and the false moral narrative of religious nationalism. These are breaches that must be addressed, and according to the text, repairing the breaches will bring revival.

“If you get rid of unfair practices,” the prophet says:

*If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out...*

Then,

*You'll be known as repairers of the breach, those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again.*

There is hope in the mourning. Jurgen Moltmann once said:

Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience.... Those who hope in God can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.

We don't have to put up with things as they are. We can contradict the breach with every prayer, every policy, every sermon from every pulpit, and every call to the people.

If we the people, with God's help, repair the breach, revival and renewal will come. Weeping and mourning may endure in this night of our discontent, but joy will come in the morning. Love and light will burst through. God will hear our prayers if we do the work of repairing society's breach.

No, America has never yet been all that she has hoped to be. But right here, right now, a Third Reconstruction is possible if we choose.

So let us ask God again what that great preacher and hymn

writer Harry Emerson Fosdick asked in the midst of the Great Depression, when the nation was in a jam and needed some breach repairers. He wrote and sang and prayed:

*God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power...
Cure thy children's warring madness,
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the search for thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Oh God,
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.*

Yes, God, grant us wisdom and grant us courage until thoughts of destroying one another give way to deeds of embracing each other; until our policies prove our promise of equal justice under law; until we decide too many have been hurting too long.

Grant us courage until in every way we show in our democratic process that everybody has a right to live; until we lift from the bottom so that everybody rises; until the stones that the builder rejected become the chief cornerstone of a new social reality.

Please God, grant us wisdom, grant us courage, until the poor are lifted, the sick are healed, children are protected, and civil rights and human rights never neglected. Grant us wisdom for the facing of this hour until love and justice are never rejected.

Grant us wisdom and courage for the facing of this hour until, together, we make sure there is racial justice and economic justice and living-wage justice and health care justice and ecological justice and disability justice and justice for homeless and justice for the poor and low-wealth and working poor and immigrant justice—until we study war no more and peace and justice are the way we live.

This is the only path to domestic tranquility and healing. So God, grant us as a people; grant us as an entire nation, grant our new president; grant our new vice president; grant every preacher; grant every politician; grant every person, Black and white, Latino, Native, Asian, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, people of faith, not of faith but with a moral conscience, every human being created by God, documented or undocumented; gay, straight or trans, young or old. And what a day it will be when our children's children call us what you have called us to be: repairers of the breach. Amen. ■

The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber, II, president of Repairers of the Breach, is a co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, a movement to build the power of poor people and change the public narrative on poverty.

OPINION

A Former Beat Cop Looks to Europe for Solutions to the Problems of American Policing

By David DeBatto

POLICE OFFICERS IN THE UNITED STATES USE DEADLY force far more often than police in Europe, in many cases [10 to 20 times more often](#). American police departments also have much shorter initial training periods than European police departments; focus less on “soft skills” such as problem-solving, community relations, and de-escalation; and also require far less formal education for newly hired recruits.

In fact, law enforcement training in the United States tends to stress taking charge of every situation with an immediate show of force, making demands for unquestioned compliance, and relying on arrests and even the use of deadly force to solve encounters with people perceived as being noncompliant. This dramatic difference in police training undoubtedly plays a major role in the lopsided numbers of [fatal police shootings](#) and arrests in the United States when compared with those on the other side of the Atlantic. These grim statistics can no longer be accepted as the normal cost of doing business for American law enforcement agencies.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, “[The U.S. approach to policing](#) differs from those of other advanced democracies, in areas including organization, funding, training, relations with minority communities, use of force, and accountability.” The short training requirements of American police departments make it difficult to cover more than just the basic fundamentals of police work needed to function on the streets. More complex and, many observers say, critical topics, such as dealing with mentally challenged individuals and people suffering from substance abuse are not adequately taught in the vast majority of American police academies, if they are taught at all. There is just no time.

I served as a police officer, a street cop, with the Yuma, Arizona, Police Department from 1982 to 1987. I attended the Arizona Law Enforcement Training Academy in Tucson, where I received my initial 400 hours of law enforcement training and

state peace officer certification. Although the training was rigorous, the courses in-depth, and the instructors excellent, the total training I received only amounted to 10 weeks of academy instruction before I was released to my law enforcement agency for assignment and follow-on training in department-specific policies and procedures.

At the time, I believed my police academy training was first-rate and more than sufficient. It did, in fact, prepare me for most of the routine situations I would later encounter on the job. However, I soon learned that I was only taught one way of dealing with aggressive or uncooperative people on the street:

employ immediate threats of violence and overwhelming force, including deadly force if necessary for noncompliance. To be sure, my instructors did suggest that we try to de-escalate the situation if possible but not to hesitate to take charge and even to “draw down” on the subject (point your weapon) if need be. In conversations I have had with many police officers over the years, I’ve learned that my academy training on responding to uncooperative people was virtually the same training given to officers everywhere.

Initial law enforcement training for American police officers in the more than [18,000](#) police departments in the country ranges from as little as eight weeks at a police academy for newly hired officers in [Mississippi](#) to six months for basic law enforcement educa-

tion for new recruits of the [Los Angeles](#) and [New York Police Departments](#).

The second and perhaps most important difference between European and American police agencies is in the focus of both the training received by new police officers and their jobs once they complete their training and join their respective agencies. In America, virtually all police departments stress a “take charge and dominate the situation” attitude that is taught and routinely reinforced from the first day a recruit arrives at the police academy. This is in stark contrast to the European focus on de-escalation and community-building. I can personally attest to being told to “kick ass and take names” at several points during my initial police training, both while attending the police academy and afterward, while a probationary officer. The phrase “we own the streets” was also drilled into my head during my academy



training. That sentiment often sets the stage for an “us against them” philosophy that only seems to harden as police officers gain more experience.

An American police officer is expected to project an aura of strength and of being in total control of their assigned beat while on patrol. Total obedience to an officer’s commands is required of the public. When that demand for total obedience is threatened or challenged, arrests and use of force, sometimes deadly force, are authorized. This officially sanctioned use of deadly force has reached unprecedented and even criminal levels of violent police behavior in the past several years.

In large urban areas like Los Angeles, for example, some police units have taken that demand for total obedience to an extreme. There are deputies and units within the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Office that operate just like the criminal gangs they are sworn to protect the citizens against, with officers behaving like gang warlords, demanding strict obedience and employing “executioners,” including fellow deputies, when their “subjects” do not toe the line.

I believe that the emergence of criminal police gangs is very possibly an unintended and disturbing outgrowth of several factors prevalent in police departments throughout the United States, including: an institutionally sanctioned attitude of “take charge of the situation at all costs” (including the use of lethal force); poor background vetting of new officers (including violent and racist social media posts); loosening recruitment standards (waiving minor crimes and drug use, allowing violent and racist tattoos, etc.); and insufficient training of new police officers, including little to no training in critical areas involving de-escalation and dealing with the mentally ill and substance abusers.

Those factors are a perfect recipe not only for producing chronic [disciplinary problems](#) among [individual officers](#) but also for allowing large-scale criminal activity to flourish by the very officers hired to protect the American public from just such activities. [New York City](#), [Chicago](#), [Baltimore](#), and other large urban areas in the United States have also experienced recent incidents of rogue police gangs and individual officers involved in committing serious crimes, often involving firearms, resulting in serious injuries and death.

Although the national population of African Americans is around 13 percent and has held steady at that figure for many years, Black people account for about 24 percent of all fatal police shootings in the United States and are [killed by police](#) at a rate that is almost 2.5 times higher than police shooting fatalities involving white victims. It is not difficult to appreciate the level of distrust that many African Americans have for the police, and why the Black Lives Matter movement has found such traction in light of the increasing number of videotaped killings of Black men by (usually white) police officers in the United States. I would be less than truthful if I said that I had not personally observed situations where a double standard applied when police dealt with a call involving a Black suspect versus a white suspect. I believe that if they were also being truthful, most white police

officers would admit to the same thing.

The values in Europe governing the use of lethal force by the police are different in the extreme. In the United States, police officers can use deadly force if they “reasonably perceive imminent threat and grave harm.” The difference in the [attitudes of the American and European police cultures](#) is evidenced in an important phrase contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. That foundational document states that police can only use deadly force when “[absolutely necessary](#).” The European law enforcement agencies and nations subject to that convention take that phrase and its meaning very seriously.

To prevent situations where the use of deadly force might become “absolutely necessary,” the institutions responsible for training newly hired police officers in Europe make a concerted effort to stress the use of nonlethal methods in dealing with potentially violent situations, including dealing with people who are intoxicated, mentally ill, suicidal, violent, armed, and posing other life-and-death situations. They not only stress nonlethal solutions, they provide the officer trainees with sufficient blocks of training in nonlethal methods of problem-solving so the officers do not usually even consider drawing their weapons in such situations.

By comparison with American police training, initial law enforcement education in Europe is much longer. For example, [initial police training](#) lasts two years for recruits in Austria and two and a half years in Germany. In [Finland and Norway](#), prior to becoming sworn police officers, trainees must first complete a bachelor’s degree while simultaneously doing an internship with a police department. This training is significantly longer and more comprehensive than that given to any American police officers.

Although all European police training involves substantial practice and qualification with firearms, as stated earlier, law enforcement training also integrates a large block of defensive tactics not involving the use of deadly force, i.e., *nonlethal defensive tactics*. For example, “By law, police officers in Germany are required to receive two hours of [defensive tactics](#) instruction *every week* while they participate in basic training.” That training involves various forms of the martial arts, such as jujitsu, judo, and kung fu. Spread out over the required two-and-a-half-year curriculum, that amounts to hundreds of *hours of training in the use of nonlethal force*, leading to a formidable amount of training in defensive tactics not requiring the use of a firearm. With this extensive emphasis on defensive tactics and the confidence-building that results, police in Europe are able to deal more often with potentially life-threatening situations without resorting to the use of lethal force—situations that, in the American context, often end up with the use of a firearm.

Our country is going through a deep soul-searching, as perhaps never before, on issues of police abuse and systemic racism. Many Americans who never gave any thought to the concept of police violence or the unjust treatment of Blacks by law enforcement have been forced to confront these realities. The sheer number

With this extensive emphasis on defensive tactics and the confidence-building that results, police in Europe are able to deal more often with potentially life-threatening situations without resorting to the use of lethal force.

of police encounters ending in death or serious injury to the public, in particular to African Americans and other people of color, cries out for fundamental reforms—we need to fix our system of pre-employment vetting, increase basic educational requirements, and require both a substantial increase in the length of law enforcement training and a drastic overhaul of its curriculum.

I have read many statements from across the country calling for “defunding the police,” and I have also read (although to a lesser degree) calls to “abolish the police.” I realize that both the calls for defunding the police and abolishing the police come from a place of acute pain and are usually meant more as a call to drastically reorder the priorities for the budgeting of police departments, to draft new policies and procedures for police behavior, and to implement new and transparent disciplinary procedures. I understand these demands and mostly agree.

However, to this writer, it’s important that we as a nation do not react to the tragic cases of intolerable police violence with poorly conceived plans for both taking a scalpel to police budgets and restructuring police departments from the ground up. Neither is a simple task. Abolishing a given police department entirely can have catastrophic consequences, and I hope all jurisdictions contemplating such a move will thoroughly review the long-term consequences for public safety beforehand. When a well-intentioned small-scale version of abolishing police presence was attempted for only a few blocks in downtown Seattle last summer during the George Floyd riots—the creation of the so-called “Capitol Hill” district—chaos ensued, along with two murders and several serious assaults. It was soon dismantled.

A community cannot function without a working police department; to do so would place the lives of everyone in the community at risk. Social workers, psychologists, and drug rehabilitation counselors are not trained, nor do they have the legal authority, to confront an armed assailant, a gang fight, a burglary or bank robbery in progress, or any number of other serious and potentially violent law enforcement situations. As much as well-meaning critics of the police and other thoughtful individuals would like to think that there is a quick fix and a viable alternative to police misconduct by doing away with most police officers and replacing them with human service workers and community activists, in reality that would result in placing the human services workers, community activists, and victims of crime in unnecessary danger. That is not the answer.

The answer to unacceptable levels of police violence and misconduct, officer-involved shooting fatalities, systemic police racism, and criminal activities of all kinds committed by the police is to hire better-educated police officers who have no criminal convictions; no history of untreated substance abuse; no violent behavior of any kind; no chronic credit problems, dishonorable military discharge or evidence of racial, ethnic, gender, or religious hatred.

It’s also now essential that we identify potential white supremacist police recruits and root out current police officers with affiliations to white supremacist and other violent, radical

anti-government groups, including militias. Police recruits should be required to have a minimum of a four-year college degree. Police academies must substantially increase their course length to at least one year and add blocks of training on nonlethal tactics, de-escalation, dealing with substance abusers and the mentally ill, community policing, race relations, anger management, stress reduction, availability of social services for victims, and more. The use of lethal force must truly be taught as a last alternative. Most importantly, the “us versus them” attitude must become: “We are all in this together.”

Rewriting police department policies to require that community services workers respond to nonviolent calls for services that can reasonably be handled by professionals other than police officers would also be a huge step in decreasing violent encounters with the police and would build trust between the community and its police department. Every call for service does not have to have a sworn police officer respond. In fact, having a police officer respond to certain calls for service can, and often does, make the situation worse.

A social worker, drug rehabilitation counselor, or housing specialist might be far more appropriate. Familiarizing themselves with

the curriculum of a representative European police academy would give American law enforcement agencies all the examples necessary to revamp their own training curriculum to better meet the needs of their community. It can be just that simple.

I want to close by briefly mentioning a critical issue that, unless addressed on a national level, will inhibit the effectiveness of all the recommendations I have just cited. That is the issue of the American gun culture. One of the main reasons European police officers are able to use nonlethal force and feel confident in their ability to control situations is the fact that the officer can be almost certain that even the most violent, noncompliant subject will be unarmed. That one fact gives the officer a huge psychological (and physical) edge in such encounters and substantially lowers the chances of a fatality.

That same scenario in America is altered simply because of the prevalence of weapons the officer might encounter on any given day. We live in a country where the public is fiercely protective of the right to bear arms, to the point where many now feel justified in shooting a police officer to defend that right. Recent incidents where several heavily armed militias stormed state capitols to voice their displeasure with mask mandates during the coronavirus pandemic illustrate the potential for deadly encounters that American police officers must deal with every day.

All the police recruitment vetting, training, and policy rewriting will struggle with the task of emulating the European example and lowering the number of police involved in shooting fatalities until the out-of-control gun culture in this nation is addressed by both lawmakers and the American public. That is also a goal we must address in earnest. ■

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Most importantly, the “us versus them” attitude must become: “We are all in this together.”

How to Design the World

By Will Novosedlik

IN HIS 2017 BESTSELLING NOVEL *AMERICAN WAR*, Egyptian-Canadian journalist and first-time novelist [Omar El Akkad](#) imagines a near future in which America has been torn apart by climate change, two civil wars, and a decade-long plague. North Africa and the Arab world have merged into a new superpower called the Bouazizi Empire, with its capital in Cairo. The intense heat of climate change has forced Cairo and other Middle Eastern cities to move underground. The Bouazizi Empire has become the largest producer of solar energy in the world, which it now dominates, along with China.

Now bring yourself back to the real world of the early 2000s. The royal family of Saudi Arabia, flanked by their engineers and scientists, are listening to a presentation by renowned Canadian designer [Bruce Mau](#). They have hired him and his company to answer two questions: What happens to this country when it runs out of oil, and what does a sustainable city of post-oil innovation and research look like in Saudi Arabia?

In the course of their research, Mau and his team discovered that if you just put up a canopy in the desert heat, you can get to within 20 degrees of comfort—something desert nomads have been doing for centuries. So they proposed a radically different approach to city building: put cities under canopies, eliminating the need to construct conventional building exteriors because the canopies would provide a significant amount of protection from the elements. Mau's team then calculated that there were 25 individual technological breakthroughs necessary to make this idea succeed. They proposed to organize 25 individual research and development projects. At the end of that process, the Saudis would own the IP.

If El Akkad's imagined future for the Middle East seems implausible, don't tell the Saudis that. They are already thinking about it. And while they may not be dreaming of world domination, they are clearly prepared to contemplate the end of oil. The question is, why would they hire Bruce Mau to help them imagine what that might look like?

Bruce Mau began his career as a graphic designer. While graphic design continues to be an important part of his practice, he was never happy to remain within the narrow confines of a fee-for-service business mostly focused on the visual design of corporate and consumer communications. In a [1994 interview](#)

for the British journal of graphic design *Eye*, Mau expressed his dissatisfaction with the constraints of mainstream design, noting, "The designer leads a kind of karaoke existence, always singing someone else's song and never saying what he thinks should be said. I am trying to roll (my practice) onto the field where content is developed."

His pursuit of designer-as-author status found its first flowering in what remains one of the most ambitious design publishing projects of the 20th century, the 1995 sensation [S.M.L.XL](#). Co-authored with Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, it was originally conceived as a monograph of the architect's work, but it quickly morphed into a 1,376-page monolith, as much a declaration of Mau's creative imagination as it was of Koolhaas's architectural philosophy. This mammoth volume reads like a series of short cinematic explorations of its subject or, as is breathlessly proclaimed on its back cover, a collection of "essays, manifestoes, diaries, fairy tales, travelogues," and an "accumulation of words and images [that] illuminates the conditions of architecture today—its splendors and miseries—exploring and revealing the corrosive impact of politics, context, the economy, globalization—the world." It completely sold out its first printing of 30,000 copies, a feat it then dwarfed by selling out its second printing of 70,000 copies.



Bruce Mau

While its illumination of contemporary architecture is debatable, *S,M,L,XL* decisively and dramatically launched Bruce Mau onto the world stage, elevating his profile among designers, architects, artists, academics, and urban intellectuals everywhere. Weighing in at a hefty six pounds, it was also an unapologetic celebration of print at a time when the internet was beginning to supplant it as the dominant channel of communication. In terms of its sheer size, *S,M,L,XL* then became the template for a succession of similarly scaled book projects, starting with the 638-page [Lifestyle](#) in 2000, followed by 2004's [Massive Change](#) and its companion traveling exhibit and, most recently, in the form of yet another giant book, the 512-page [MAU MC24](#), subtitled *Bruce Mau's 24 Principles for Designing Massive Change in Your Life and Work*, released in the summer of 2020 by Phaidon.

Like Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller, each of whose books reads like a variation of the one that preceded it, Mau could be accused of writing the same book over and over again. He freely admits that this is not unjustified but defends the process as a response to the changing context of the world in which design operates. Each book builds on the last, adjusting and refining its message to reflect the shifts in culture, technology,

business, and politics that have occurred over the last 25 years.

Mentioning Mau in the same breath as McLuhan and Fuller locates him in the rarefied realm of evangelizing public intellectuals. This has drawn fire from more than one commentator, among them the late Canadian cultural critic [Robert Fulford](#), who in a 2001 review of *Lifestyle* lamented that Mau is “a talented designer who now stands before us costumed as a philosopher, a social critic and an artist. In these roles he appears to have nothing to say.”

Indeed, while strongly disagreeing with Fulford’s damning appraisal, this writer, in trying to characterize the unique niche Mau has created for himself, nonetheless agrees that he is not an artist. While *S,M,L,XL* reads as more of an art project, I was reluctant at the time to consider him outside the practical realm of design.

Further, *S,M,L,XL* solves no practical problems that I can see, beyond perhaps how to advance one’s career dramatically and have a lot of intellectual fun doing it. But Mau’s efforts since then have evolved: They all reflect a belief that design is very much about problem-solving, while art is not. As the Czech philosopher [Vilem Flusser](#) observed, design is the bridge between art and science to achieve a practical solution. Bruce Mau agrees and takes it a step further: “One of the things that I am advocating is for designers to take responsibility for their work. There’s a reason this era is called the Anthropocene. It’s because we are changing the shape of the world.”

Only Republicans and religious fundamentalists would argue with that. Most reasonable people have come to the realization that we have really messed things up. But how to clean up the mess, which is now a profoundly existential challenge? This is the subject of *MC24*.

The book is built around a set of 24 principles that have informed and been informed by the evolution of Mau’s experience and practice as a designer over the last 30 years. In the opening pages, Mau explains that he undertook *MC24* after realizing that when people asked him how he did what he does, he could show them what he did but not how he did it. It took him 10 years and 512 pages to come up with the answer.

For anyone who has worked in the worlds of design and innovation, the principles articulated in *MC24* are difficult to argue with. They are laid out with prescriptive urgency and supported by examples of his own work as well as that of others. And they are underpinned by the strong belief that, indeed, design in both its canon and practice is the answer to the world’s problems. This belief is based on yet another premise, shared by [Dr. Ron Burnett](#), president emeritus of Vancouver’s Emily Carr University

of Art and Design, who said in 2007, “I would argue that until recently, the context for understanding the role of design has been extremely limited. Not design in the highly specific sense, but design as fundamental to nearly everything that humans do and create.”

To follow this reasoning, it’s not hard to imagine that Burnett and Mau might go so far as to paraphrase Descartes, to say “I design, therefore I am.” Any decision that has a material outcome is a design decision, from how one decides what to do in a day to what one decides to wear to what a chef decides to put on the menu. The difference is that the chef gets paid for her design decisions because she has the gift of creating a culinary experience that most of us are incapable of. Sadly, the result of many ordinary design decisions—and even more professional ones—ranges from unremarkable to downright destructive. Mau’s ambition is to prevent such negative outcomes.

There is a rich, if rather lonely, tradition of thinking critically about design. In 1964, British graphic designer Ken Garland and 20 colleagues published a manifesto in the pages of *The Guardian* newspaper titled “[First Things First](#),” which implored designers to question their role as uncritical servants of commerce and consider the power they have to solve real

human problems. In a 1968 article by Austrian-American industrial designer [Victor Papanek](#), titled “[Do-It-Yourself Murder](#),” the author said, “Members of the of the profession have lost integrity and responsibility and have become purveyors of trivia, while the health and energy requirements of the world’s people lie well within the scope of long-term design planning.” Papanek went on to write scathing and very practical critiques of consumerist design in books such as [Design for the Real World](#) and [The Green Imperative](#).

Papanek’s efforts were recognized by organizations like Unesco but roundly rejected by the industrial design community. I can recall expressing admiration for Bruce Mau’s creative audacity back in the 1990s only to be met with similar indignation from my peers. They saw him as an assault on design’s “real” mission, which was to participate uncritically in the project of capitalist commerce—although few of them would have articulated it quite as candidly.

Mau sees himself very much as an heir to Garland and Papanek. One of *MC24*’s principles is called “Design for the Bottom of the Pyramid.” Mau explains, “Papanek’s critique is largely still true. So much of our work is crowded around the so-called desires of the top billion people. We’re all trying to solve the Xbox problem, which really isn’t a problem. Poverty is a problem.”



He points to the book *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, by C.K. Prahalad. Says Mau: “He talks about how almost no one is thinking about the challenges of the poor from a design and innovation perspective. He shows that when you do innovate solutions for the poorest of the world you are often revolutionizing both the discipline and the sector in which you operate.” It’s another way of saying that design practice is very much a reflection of the clients whom it serves.

While *MC24*’s principles may be designed to address the needs at the bottom of the pyramid, not many below or even within the top billion could afford to buy the book that contains them. It has what one might call the Gutenberg Problem. The Gutenberg Bible is rightly credited with initiating universal literacy, but on its publication, its size, high production costs, and limited run made it very expensive, accessible only to the wealthiest patrons. It took 50 years before Venetian scholar [Aldus Manutius](#) figured out how to reduce books to a much smaller, cheaper format that ordinary people could afford. That effort much more effectively hastened literacy, and the rest, as they say, is history.

In an era dominated by digital content, *MC24* is a rare and precious artifact. Covered in iridescent pink silk, it almost, as Canadian architect [Bruce Kuwabara](#) recently told Mau, behaves like a light source. One hesitates to pick it up for fear of soiling its delicate cover. So how does the book address this tension between the precious and the practical? As Mau asserts, “McLuhan said that when a technology loses its utility it becomes an art form. Once it’s replaced by a new technology, it becomes a platform for creative expression. There is no need for *MC24* to be in book form. There are obviously far easier and more effective ways to distribute that content. The book becomes an artwork and to a great degree a declaration. It’s a manifesto, a statement that by giving it physical form we are declaring our commitment to these ideas.”

MC24 may be printed, but because the summer of 2020 was a publication graveyard for most authors, Mau doubled down on digital channels to promote the book’s launch. He participated in more than 40 podcasts, webinars, and Zoom sessions, often involving people who themselves have audiences. As genuine as his beliefs about the importance of design may be, he also understands how beneficial his book projects have been for business. Each one has led to several years’ worth of revenue from new clients whose interests are aligned or even shaped by the import of his books.

Recognizing that, as an object, *MC24* prioritizes the precious over the practical, the next phase of its journey is to go digital. And this is where it has the potential to become a truly interactive learning platform, made as accessible to today’s audiences as the books of Manutius were to his. To which Mau adds, “I look forward to the digital version. I’ll be able to evolve it and build on it for the rest of my life.”

Principles may inform our actions, but they are not the same as the actions themselves. What *MC24* offers is not solutions to the problems we face but approaches to solving them. It provides lots of clear-headed guidance that, on a rational level, makes tremendous sense. Take the second principle, “Fact-Based Optimism.” Design by definition is forward-facing, a posture that is inherently optimistic.

When you think about it, the problems Mau wants us all to solve are so existentially threatening that to face them with anything but optimism is tantamount to giving up, which, in these conditions, could mean collective suicide.

But even Bruce Mau knows that decisions are not often based on reason. No matter how informed, most are made in the moment and based on emotion. Another of the principles, “Design the New Normal” recognizes this fact. When we think of Covid-19, for example, there is pressure to return to the way things used to be, the “old normal,” but

there is a tremendous opportunity to embrace change and innovate for a better future. The former impulse is a nostalgic manifestation of fear, perfectly understandable in the circumstances. But how do you decouple people from that fear?

“Reinforce stability to embrace change,” asserts Mau. “The urge to go back is a nostalgia for stability. I learned this from former Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. He taught me that when we are trying to change something, we also need to do everything we can to emphasize what we want to keep. It helps put people in the right frame of mind to be able to think about the change.”

As a creative iconoclast who has enjoyed one of the most extraordinary careers in the design world, going backward is not in Mau’s vocabulary. He admits that for many years he was always so excited to embrace the future that he ignored the fear in the rest of the room. He now recognizes that as a lack of empathy. “The biggest mistake I made as a designer was not respecting that fear.”

He takes heart from what Covid-19 has taught us: “The great gift of the pandemic is that it has shown us that we can



change. Things we thought would go on the same forever actually stopped. For instance, we never imagined that there would be clean water and fish in the canals of Venice. Or that the air could be clear in the streets of Beijing. To me, facts like these present us with a huge opportunity to accelerate things in the next few years.”

Do designers have the power and the agency to be the accelerant? Can design, as the very first sentence in *MC24* claims, change everything? Mau believes designers have more power now than they ever did.

“We have never experienced more possibility, more agency, more capacity to shape the world. As designers we have this extraordinary capacity to envision the future and systematically execute the vision. We don’t understand how powerful we are so we don’t act and take responsibility for our power. The more I work on this the more important I think it is to come to terms with that power so that we can really contribute the most that we can. We have a very special place in the culture.”

If designers really want to accelerate change, they will need to come to terms with how to fund it and start having conversations in some very high places. Mark Carney, who was governor of the Bank of England until last year and the head of the Bank of Canada before that, is now the United Nations envoy for climate action and finance. His job is to persuade policymakers, chief executives, bankers, and investors to focus on the environment. In a recent [BBC News report](#), he claimed that, in terms of human mortality, climate change “will be the equivalent of a coronavirus crisis every year from the middle of this century forward. The scale of investment in energy, sustainable energy and sustainable infrastructure needs to double. Every year, for the course of the next three decades, \$3.5 trillion a year, for 30 years.” That would require a global pot of \$170 trillion of private capital, which, he says, “is looking for disclosure.” If designers have any hope of effecting significant change, they will need to be talking to those investors.

As the story of the Saudis at the beginning of this article made clear, Bruce Mau has certainly demonstrated an ability to open doors in the halls of power. But he can’t do it all alone. He has challenged us, and it remains to be seen how—or even if—the design community will respond. ■

Will Novosedlik is a writer, strategist, and designer who lives in Toronto.

Coalinga and Covid-19: A Compendium of Errors

By Barbara Koeppel

AS WITH CALIFORNIA’S STATE PRISONS, WHERE OVER the past year 49,000 inmates have caught Covid-19 and 200 have died, the virus has also clobbered the state’s mental hospitals. At the state facility in Coalinga (see “[Modern Day Gulag in the Golden State](#)” in the June 2019 *Washington Spectator*), 495 of 1,300 residents (that’s more than one out of every three men) have tested positive—20 of them in just the past 14 days; also, 20 men have died. Of the roughly 2,000 staff, 402 have tested positive.

At one time, 24 of Coalinga’s 28 units were under quarantine.

Unlike the state prisons, where overcrowding is the norm and inmates have no way to stay socially distant, Coalinga is a relatively new, large facility. According to the two staff and six residents I interviewed (only one of whom agreed to be identified), the virus could have been contained at Coalinga. But it wasn’t. Instead, it’s been a how-to-get-it-wrong from the start.

All those I interviewed say the crisis stems from Coalinga’s use of “floaters”—staff who are assigned from unit to unit, doing overtime when there’s a shortage of personnel. Allen Fletcher, a resident at Coalinga for nine years, says, “They go straight from a quarantined unit to one that isn’t, carrying Covid with them.”

Brandon Price, Coalinga’s director, sent a facility-wide memo stating that staff could do this if they first went home, got rest, showered and changed clothes. However, one therapist observed that “maybe some staff actually do this, but I’ve never seen anyone check to see if they have showered and changed their clothes before they switch units.”

According to a psychiatric technician, “Although our temperature is taken when we enter the building every day, if we’re asymptomatic, they let us work and no one reports it.”

She was so upset by this practice that she’s filing a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

How the men get meals is another foolproof fiasco. When the virus first hit, Coalinga shut its dining halls to limit the men’s exposure to each other. Since then, it has sent food carts to each unit’s community room. The problem is that the men line up to get their trays, standing one right behind the other, and sit alongside each other at the tables while they eat.

For months, staff didn’t ask them to stand six feet apart; nor were lines painted on the floor (as they are in stores across the country). Just recently, some were drawn in these areas to encourage the men to stand apart. But few men do, and staff don’t ask them to take this precaution. To protect himself, Fletcher says he waits until nearly all the trays have been taken and then retrieves his.

Then there’s the mess with the masks—the rules for which have changed over time.

Fletcher says masks weren’t distributed until late last summer. Before that, a friend sent him one, which he wore until it was taken away. Since then, each man has been given one cloth

mask a day. The staff collects them at night—to be laundered—and replaces these with clean ones. But, Fletcher says, “many men wear the same mask for days, and no one asks that they turn them in. Also, some men still won’t wear them.” Why? Two residents said, “The guys believe they’ll die here, so they say it doesn’t matter if they get the virus.” One added, “We sleep three or four to a room, where there’s no fresh air or ventilation. So what’s the point?”

Most important, Director Brandon Price never mandated the residents to wear masks. Fletcher says Price could easily have offered inducements, like offering pizza once a month to the unit with the best record. But nothing like this ever happened,” he says.

Fletcher notes that California’s Governor Newsom ordered the staff to wear masks, but he says some still don’t follow the rule when they’re in their offices—which means they spread the virus to each other.

Telephones in the community rooms are another serious spreader. Since residents aren’t allowed personal phones, 50 men on a unit share a few phones, which are in constant use, in the community room. Last summer, California State Senator William Monning told Stephanie Clendenin, the director of California State Hospitals, that the staff should sanitize them after each use. But it doesn’t happen.

Fletcher said, “The cleaning is chaotic or not done at all—depending on the unit. The guards or staff were supposed to sanitize the phones with hand wipes every two hours.

But even this makes no sense, since many men use the phones over the two-hour period.” The rules recently changed, and residents can now get a sanitary wipe from staff—but only after they get a call. “This also makes no sense, since you have to answer the phone first—using one that someone else has just put down. You then tell the person who called you to wait, while you get a wipe to clean it,” Fletcher says.

Then there are the Covid-19 tests, which are haphazard. One resident said he knew of a social worker who was contact-traced as being exposed to someone with the virus. He should have been quarantined until he was tested. But he wasn’t tested and still meets with his patient groups. The supervisors know he was exposed, but he wasn’t required to be tested. “This is crazy, since it’s so easy to get tested. They give them right here at Coalinga,” he said.

Use of quarantines is also problematic. When a unit is quarantined—because one of the staff or residents tested positive—they must wait 14 days to resume regular activities, even if everyone is subsequently tested and the results are negative. During that time, the men are not allowed in the mall area, library, post office, computer lab, or commissary and can only get outside for one hour every three days. Also, all religious services were stopped last spring. “We could easily have had them while practicing social distancing. But they’re not allowed,” one resident said.

Unlike the California prisons, where many old or disabled inmates were released to families, group homes, or long-term care facilities to stem the virus’s spread, at Coalinga, Director Price has refused to let any residents go. Even those whose

original diagnoses of “mental disorder” had been removed from their records were still not allowed to leave.

Although Governor Newsom signed an order allowing state hospitals to release some patients to the community (to lessen their exposure to the virus) and provide outpatient treatment where necessary, Clendenin nixed the offer. Thus, not one person in any of the state’s five mental hospitals has been released, though clinical teams at Patton State Hospital said certain patients could leave. Fletcher asks, “Why keep them in a mental facility when their teams say they can be released?”

He added, “We’re grateful that Governor Newsom has tried to help us, but Price and Clendenin are adamant.”

One nurse said that Price should make daily rounds to every unit to meet with staff and the men to check that things are being done properly. “Instead, he stays in his office and has no idea what’s going on. But he didn’t tour the facility before the virus, so he certainly isn’t going to come around now.”

Author’s note: The men are called patients, but Coalinga residents are sex offenders who’ve completed their prison term and then are sent to this facility—often for life—under California’s civil commitment law. (See “[Sex Crimes and Criminal Justice](#)” in the June 2018 Washington Spectator). In the United States, 20 states have these laws, which warehouse the former prisoners who, depending on the state, never get out. The rationale is that the public is kept safe by holding the men in one of these facilities. But the recidivism rates—which are under 5 percent—in the 20 states that have the law are the same as in the 30 states that don’t. ■

Barbara Koepfel is an investigative journalist in Washington, D.C.



IN SEARCH OF RACIAL DIALOGUE

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Continued from page 2, **POWERHOUSE**

“Volunteer and Contribute to key candidates and organizations (FreedomWorks, Tea Party Patriots, [anti-abortion group] Susan B. Anthony List) that are engaged in turning out voters” for the midterms.

But by February 2020, the CNP, fearing the erosion of Trump’s support, shifted its strategy from boosting the popular vote to deflecting it. Lisa Nelson, the CEO of the American Legislative Exchange Council, told the group, “We’ve been focused on the national vote, and obviously we all want President Trump to win, and win the national vote, but it’s very clear from all the comments and all the suggestions up front that, really, what it comes down to is the states, and the state legislators.” Her organization, she told them, had already drafted a model resolution “to make sure there’s no confusion among conservative legislators around national popular vote and the Electoral College.”

Nelson noted that her group was exploring additional ways to invalidate a potential Trump loss in consultation with three election experts, including CNP board of governors member Cleta Mitchell, “who I know you all know, on trying to identify what are those action items that legislators can take in their states, and I think that they’ve identified a few. They can write a letter to the secretary of state, questioning the validity of an election, and saying, ‘What *did* happen that night?’ So we are drafting a lot of those things. If you have ideas in that area, let us know, and we’ll get them to the state legislators, and they can start to kind of exercise their political muscle in that area.”

So as early as February 2020, the CNP and its advisers were already anticipating various strategies to overturn the results of the election in the event of the loss of either the popular vote or the Electoral College, or both. At the same time, they adopted a three-pronged approach to enhancing Trump’s chances in November. The first involved expanding their use of data to juice Republican votes and suppress Democratic turnout. The second was to mobilize supporters in swing states to ignite Tea Party–like protests against the virus-related public safety lockdowns. The third was to deploy physicians with dubious credentials to dismiss the dangers of Covid-19 through a massive media blitz. All three initiatives were activated in April. It was a rehash of a familiar formula, concocting groups whose names and URLs changed with dizzying speed and calling them “grassroots” organizations. (Critics preferred the term “astroturf.”)

United in Purpose took the lead. In June 2016, UiP had convened the epic Times Square gathering of 1,000 fundamentalist activists to give Trump their blessing. Now, over the spring of 2020, UiP held a series of conference calls to update its strategy. One call—a recording of which was leaked to *The Intercept* reporter Lee Fang—took place in mid-April. UiP Chairman Ken Eldred told his associates on the call that the Covid-19 virus was a “gift from God” because it was turning Americans back to Christ and building audiences for religious broadcasts—which had been crucial platforms for political campaigns. But “Satan

UiP Chairman Ken Eldred told his associates on the call that the Covid-19 virus was a “gift from God” because it was turning Americans back to Christ and building audiences for religious broadcasts.

has been busy too,” Eldred warned. “The virus has messed up many of our plans involving our in-person meetings with voters.” UiP called its 2020 campaign “Operation Ziklag” (named after a Biblical town that served as a base for the Philistines until it was won by David).

The April call featured various movers and shakers from the CNP. Ralph Reed spoke to the “macro political landscape,” explaining that a key component of the Democrats’ strategy was the Black vote in swing states like Michigan and Wisconsin. The Democrats had experienced a significant drop-off between 2012 and 2016. “There were 47,000 fewer Black votes cast in just Milwaukee County alone,” Reed told the call participants—in Wisconsin, a state Trump had won by fewer than 24,000 votes.

This was not a coincidence. In September 2020, Britain’s Channel 4 [reported](#) that the Trump campaign had used Cambridge Analytica data to profile and target 3.5 million Black voters in 2016, assigning them to a category the campaign called “Deterrence,” with messaging designed to suppress the vote.

Reed told his associates that “his ‘data partners’ had identified 26 million key voters in battleground states, about three-fourths of whom were Facebook users,” *The Intercept’s* Fang reported. Once again, the 2020 strategy, like the 2016 efforts, would strive to get out the vote for Republicans and suppress the vote of traditional Democrats.

Abortion continued to be a major calling card of the campaign, spearheaded by CNP Gold Circle member Marjorie Dannenfelser, the head of the Susan B. Anthony List. Dannenfelser, who had recently joined the UiP alliance, [told the callers](#) that her organization had conducted surveys on messaging with pro-life working-class voters in battleground Rust Belt states and found that its “born alive” formulation on abortion, promoted by Trump, “has had a tremendous effect in moving persuadable voters in all those areas in Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.” This would strengthen Trump’s chances in the swing states that comprised the “northern path” to victory: Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, as well as the “southern path” of North Carolina, Florida, and Arizona. (Georgia, assumed to be solidly in the Republican column, would prove a wild card.)

The CNP’s second stratagem to “reopen the economy” debuted around the same time. On April 13, *The Washington Post’s* Jeff Stein and Robert Costa [reported](#) that White House staff had presented Trump with a list of “100 business executives” who could advise him as to how to jump-start the economy. The piece quoted CNP co-founder Richard Viguerie, who began his career under the tutelage of disgraced radio evangelist Billy James Hargis and went on to pioneer the use of direct mail in political marketing. “Obviously, the sooner we get the economy going and back up, the better it’s going to be for conservatives and Republicans,” Viguerie said. A lot of them, he added, “feel there might be an overreaction to all of this [epidemic].”

According to *The Washington Post’s* unnamed sources, “The outside effort from conservative groups is expected to be led by

Stephen Moore, a conservative at the Heritage Foundation who is close with White House economic officials; Jenny Beth Martin, co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots; Adam Brandon, president of FreedomWorks, a conservative advocacy organization; and Lisa Nelson, chief executive of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the conservative pro-business policy and lobbying organization with ties to the Koch brothers.”

This initiative marked a shift in the CNP profile. Going into the 2016 elections, the public faces of the organization had been prominent fundamentalists. Tony Perkins, CNP president from 2016 to 2019, is also an ordained Southern Baptist minister and longtime head of the fundamentalist lobbying group Family Research Council, and he has hosted Christian nationalists Robert Jeffress and David Barton on his radio broadcasts. Almost half of Trump’s original Evangelical Advisory Board—including Perkins—were members of the CNP, and they were in and out of the Oval Office on a regular basis. But in 2019, Perkins was succeeded as CNP president by William Walton, the founder and chairman of Rappahannock Ventures, a private equity firm, with long ties to the Koch Brothers and a limited religious profile. In 2015, Walton [chaired a panel](#) at the CNP, stating, “Most of my career has been spent in business and on Wall Street, and I was among the first to attend the Charles Koch seminars.” Other figures connected to the Koch empire ascended in the CNP hierarchy. Jenny Beth Martin, who co-founded the Tea Party Patriots with Koch backing, rose to the office of secretary. Adam Brandon, head of the Koch-founded “grassroots” organization FreedomWorks, took a spot on the board of directors of CNP Action, the organization’s lobbying arm.

David Koch died in August 2019, but his brother Charles carried on. A man with no particular religious profile, Koch embarked on a “charm offensive,” distancing himself from Trump and his fundamentalist allies, presenting himself to the media as a “unifier” (and scrubbing the CNP’s Free Enterprise Award from his profile). But his funding activities told a different story. The Center for Media and Democracy’s Alec Kotch has recorded millions of dollars in grants from Koch and affiliates such as the [Donors Trust](#) to organizations run by leading members of the CNP. These [include](#) ALEC, as well as the State Policy Network, the Leadership Institute, the Heritage Foundation, Judicial Watch, and Turning Point USA. Some of these groups would play important roles in attempts to disrupt the electoral process in the months ahead.

The Washington Post’s April story on the “100 business leaders” initiative made no mention of the CNP, despite the fact that among the leading figures, Moore was on the CNP board of governors, Nelson was a member, and Martin and Brandon were officers. Moore warned the *Post* that the disaffection of “the right” presented a growing threat to public order, neglecting to mention the ways the CNP was stoking the flames. “There’s a massive movement on the right now, growing exponentially,” he said. “In the next two weeks, you’ll see protests in the streets by conservatives; you’ll see a big pushback against the lockdown in

some states. People are at the boiling point.”

The “boiling point” materialized over the next two weeks, as Moore forecast, with the assistance of another CNP-linked effort called Convention of States, led by Mark Meckler, co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots and CNP Gold Circle member. He [told the Post](#) his group would function as a “clearinghouse where all these guys can find each other” and praised “spontaneous citizen groups self-organizing on the Internet and protesting what they perceive to be government overreach.” Earlier that week, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that the coalition’s members were mobilizing their networks for state-level rallies, filing lawsuits, and commissioning polls, all to counter the lockdowns. “Non-profit groups including FreedomWorks and Tea Party Patriots have used their social media accounts and text and email lists to spread the word about the protests across the country.” The most publicized events occurred at the Michigan statehouse on April 15 and May 1, when armed protesters invaded the state Capitol, but these were far from the only ones.

The new “businessmen’s group,” previewed in *The Washington Post* as “100 business executives,” officially debuted on April 27, billed as the “Save Our Country Coalition.” It called for a series of measures to reopen the economy, flying in the face of expert medical recommendations for curbing the epidemic, whose U.S. death toll now approached 55,000. The CNP was heavily represented among the group’s leadership, including stalwarts such as Richard Viguerie, Ed Meese, and Kenneth Blackwell, as well as rising stars Adam Brandon, Jenny Beth Martin, and Lisa Nelson.

One notable addition was a California physician named [Dr. Simone Gold](#). Over the summer, she emerged as a key player in the third prong of the CNP’s campaign, the war against public health policy, the result of another set of conference calls between Trump campaign staff and members of CNP Action. On one April call, published by the Center for Media and Democracy, CNP President William Walton told the group, “We need to make not just the economic argument, we need to make the health argument, and we need doctors to make that argument, not us.” Within days, Gold began to appear across right-wing media platforms, promoting the false message that hydroxychloroquine (a medication used to treat autoimmune diseases) was both a prophylactic and a cure for Covid-19 ([as reported](#) in the September 2020 *Washington Spectator*). On June 1, *The Guardian* quoted Brandon’s report that he had raised \$800,000 along the way to a \$5 million multiplatform media blitz for the campaign.

On July 27, Jenny Beth Martin, Gold, and a dozen other physicians held a Washington, D.C., press conference to deliver their dangerous message. The video reached millions of viewers on Breitbart and President Trump’s and Donald Trump Jr.’s Twitter feeds. Major social media platforms quickly removed it as a violation of their Covid-19 misinformation policies, but Gold’s message has continued to circulate on alternative platforms.

The 2020 political campaigns stumbled ahead. Both the

Gold began to appear across right-wing media platforms, promoting the false message that hydroxychloroquine was both a prophylactic and a cure for Covid-19.

Democrats and the Republicans suspended rallies and canvassing in the late spring. On June 5, Joe Biden won the 1,991 delegates needed for the Democratic nomination, and the general campaign officially began. Democrats proceeded cautiously, forgoing rallies and canvassing on the advice of public health officials. The Trump campaign, on the other hand, returned to holding mass gatherings, starting with a rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on June 20. This became the first of the campaign's "superspreader" events. Four weeks after the rally, Oklahoma's Covid-19 cases tripled. On July 30, rally attendee and former Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain died of Covid-19.

Trump and the CNP doubled down. On August 19, the CNP opened its meeting at the Ritz-Carlton in Pentagon City with a panel featuring attorney Sidney Powell. Two days later, Donald Trump addressed the CNP in his single major convention-evening event. Over chants of "USA! USA!" Trump acknowledged key supporters by name, including CNP President William Walton, Executive Director Bob McEwen, and Secretary Jenny Beth Martin. His rambling speech attacked familiar enemies and lauded familiar friends, including evangelicals, extractive industries, and the gun lobby. Photos from the event showed several hundred tightly packed, unmasked guests in the ballroom. That afternoon's program featured attorney Cleta Mitchell, an Oklahoma native and a longtime CNP board of governors member, on panels called "Election Integrity: Securing the Ballot Box" and "Election Integrity: Action Steps." Executive committee member Brent Bozell III told his fellow members that the left plans to "steal this election."

"And if they get away with that, what happens?" Bozell demanded. "Democracy is finished because they usher in totalitarianism."

Trump's speech to the CNP was released by the White House and widely covered by the national press, but news organizations gave short shrift to the CNP and the scope of its operations. (*The New York Times*, for example, [identified](#) it as merely "a conservative group.")

But the CNP was becoming less of a mystery. Over the previous months, a small band of researchers had made significant progress in shining a light on the organization's agenda. Brent Allpress, an academic in Australia, found a back door into its online archives and began to access records of past meetings, which were used in a British documentary called *People You May Know* (in which this reporter also appears). Two watchdog organizations stepped up their monitoring of the CNP: The Center for Media and Democracy added new funding streams and strategic initiatives, as well as publishing CNP files sourced from Brent Allpress, and Documented found additional CNP meeting materials. Both groups posted meeting agendas, videos of presentations, and—critically—the updated membership rosters for September 2020 that Allpress had accessed. CNP had intentionally elevated its profile, but now it was in danger of losing its cloak altogether.

CNP executive committee member Tom Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, asked his audience for ideas to foil mail-in voting: "We need to stop those ballots from going out, and I want the lawyers here to tell us what to do."

The rest of the August CNP meeting was held under the usual conditions of secrecy, but this time its proceedings were leaked to *Washington Post* reporter Robert O'Harrow Jr., who published an account on October 14. The CNP leaders were sounding notes of alarm. "This is a spiritual battle. This is good versus evil," CNP president Walton [told](#) the group. "We have to do everything possible to win." Trump's disastrous handling of the Covid-19 crisis was hurting his chances at the polls, and Democratic voters were newly energized. The old messaging about abortion and unisex bathrooms looked less compelling as the pandemic death toll mounted and millions were thrown out of work.

The CNP went into crisis mode, focusing on the mechanics of the election. Charlie Kirk, head of the right-wing student group Turning Point USA and a relatively new member, took the stage to celebrate the closure of campuses, which could deprive the Democrats of a half-million student votes. "So, please keep the campuses closed," he [said](#). Executive committee member Tom Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, asked his audience for ideas to foil mail-in voting: "We need to stop those ballots from going out, and I want the lawyers here to tell us what to do."

The lawyers in the room were eager to help. One of them, the CNP board member Cleta Mitchell, was a partner in the influential Milwaukee-based law firm Foley and Lardner. She also served on the board of directors of the ultraconservative Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, run by fellow CNP board member Richard Graber. In 2020, the Bradley Foundation [granted](#) hundreds of thousands of dollars to ALEC, FreedomWorks, and the CNP itself.

Cleta Mitchell had worked closely with another leading CNP member on election matters in recent years. This was Ginni Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and a member of the board of directors of CNP Action. Ginni Thomas was known as the not-so-secret weapon of the CNP and its allies. A longtime supporter of Charlie Kirk and Turning Point USA, she had spoken at the organization's student conference and served on its advisory council. She was listed as a contributor at the *Daily Caller*, the online media platform founded and funded by fellow CNP members. At the May 2019 CNP meeting, Thomas and Mitchell offered a joint presentation on electoral strategies, and at the February 2020 meeting, Heritage Foundation alumna Rachel Bovard praised Thomas as a key liaison to the White House. "She is one of the most powerful and fierce women in Washington," Bovard [said](#). (Bovard joined Thomas on the board of CNP Action shortly afterward.)

A few weeks later, the CNP received some important news. On September 18, Justice Ginsburg had died, at the age of 87, after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. CNP affiliates swung into action, repeating the process that had won them two previous conservative justices under the Trump administration. Kelly Shackelford, CNP vice president and chairman of CNP Action, had [described](#) his operation at the meeting the previous February, as reported by *The Washington Post*: "He bragged about

extensive behind-the-scenes coordination by his group and other non-profit organizations to influence the White House selection of federal judges. ‘Some of us literally opened a whole operation on judicial nominations and vetting,’ he said. ‘We poured millions of dollars into this to make sure the president has good information, he picks the right judges.’”

Shackelford’s forces promoted the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, another Federalist Society alum, to fill Ginsburg’s seat. Barrett was a longtime CNP favorite. Investigative journalist Robert Maguire [learned](#) that, as of July 2018, the domain name “confirm-barrett.com” had already been reserved by the Judicial Crisis Network, founded and chaired by CNP board of governors member Gary Marx and closely aligned with the Federalist Society. The Judicial Crisis Network went on to spend at least \$9.4 million in television spots and \$4.3 million in digital ads, direct mail, and text messaging to promote Barrett’s nomination, according to a [report](#) by Michael Biesecker and Brian Slodysko of the Associated Press.

September 26 was another red-letter day for the CNP. President Trump hosted a Rose Garden ceremony to announce Barrett’s nomination, and the CNP treated the event as a victory lap. Once confirmed, Barrett would serve as the fulcrum for the most conservative Supreme Court in nearly a century, the fulfillment of decades of hard work by CNP strategists. At least 15 members of the CNP were listed among the attendees at the Rose Garden event—equal to the combined number of White House officials and members of Congress present. Among the crowd [were](#) old CNP warhorses Tony Perkins, Ralph Reed, and Marjorie Dannenfelser, as well as newly prominent election wranglers Jenny Beth Martin, Cleta Mitchell, and Tom Fitton. Exactly one month later, on October 26—one week before the election—Amy Coney Barrett would be confirmed as the Supreme Court’s new associate justice, after her nomination sailed through the Republican-controlled Senate.

But the Rose Garden event may have also constituted the CNP’s last hurrah for the Trump era. Defying urgent public health advisories, more than 150 guests sat in tight rows, mostly maskless, engaging in spirited conversation. Two weeks later, Dr. Anthony Fauci [decried](#) it as a “superspreader event,” as at least seven attendees tested positive for Covid-19—including Donald and Melania Trump.

On Election Day, November 3, the nation held its breath. Ralph Reed’s massive get-out-the-vote effort had driven up turnout, but so had the Democrats. On November 4, as the results hung in abeyance, a site called StoptheSteal.us was registered. It was [discovered](#) the following day by Brent Allpress, who traced its registration to an account called “Vice and Victory,” owned by a curious figure named Ali Alexander. Alexander was sometimes known as “Ali Akbar,” the name he was listed under as a member of

the CNP on 2017 and 2018 rosters. He began to use the name “[Alexander](#)” after pleading guilty to two counts of felony in 2007 and 2008. As “Ali Alexander,” he [announced](#) the launch of #StoptheSteal on Twitter with a list of 15 partners and the text, “Proud to be working with these patriots to Save the Election.” One of them was CNP member Ed Martin, head of the Phyllis Schlafly Eagles Forum Fund.

A new Stop the Steal Facebook group had appeared on November 4 and was banned the following day. *The Washington Post* [quoted](#) the page’s recruitment of “boots on the ground to protect the integrity of the vote” and solicitation of donations to cover “flights and hotels to send people’ to battleground states including Georgia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.” According to the *Post*, the “Stop the Steal” group appeared as a co-host on 12 different Facebook protest listings, among them one for a car caravan from California. The group gained 360,000 members before it was removed for violating Facebook’s rules for inflammatory content, as users called for “civil war” and “overthrowing the government.”

According to Allpress, the StoptheSteal.us site provided organizational information for protests on November 6 at counting centers and capitols across six “contested” swing states. CNP member Charlie Kirk was listed as the primary organizational contact

for Nevada protests, along with alt-right activist Mike Cernovich. The Center for Media and Democracy [reported](#) the state-level involvement of other CNP members and added that FreedomWorks, run by CNP Action board of governors member Adam Brandon, was organizing “Protect the Vote” protests in five states.

On November 6, as Biden pulled ahead, Jenny Beth Martin [announced](#) that Tea Party Patriot Action was going to hold “Protect the Vote” rallies in four swing states, “working with FreedomWorks, Turning Points [sic], Heritage”—all run by



members of the CNP—“and countless social media influencers to help organize and assemble citizens in various locations around the country to voice our support for transparent and honest ballot counting.”

The election was called for Joe Biden on November 7, based on late-counted ballots in Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Attorney Cleta Mitchell made her feelings known on Fox News, [stating](#), “We’re already double-checking and finding dead people having voted,” and tweeted that the Georgia recount was “A FAKE!!!”

The CNP refused to surrender and convened a special meeting November 12 to 14. Mitchell appeared at the meeting on an updated panel, now called “Election Results and Legal Battles: What Now?” And CNP Action answered the question with a new set of “Action Steps.”

These [directed](#) members to lobby legislators in Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Nevada to support litigation challenging the election outcome; to “actively educate your pastor and church” with resources from Charlie Kirk, the Family Research Council, and others; to “reach out” to 10 CNP affiliates engaged in the Georgia runoff election; and (ominously) to “connect with local law enforcement.”

Other measures were being set in motion. A familiar figure resurfaced:

Trump’s first national security adviser, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn. Flynn, too, had a history with the CNP. In July 2016, Flynn [appeared](#) on a CNP panel on “Terrorism and the Condition of the Military.” Academic researcher Allpress [found](#) Flynn listed in a Zoominfo database of “email addresses and direct dials for the Council for National Policy employees” with a CNP phone number (first listed on November 26 and still active as of February 11—throughout the period when he was appearing at the Stop the Steal protests, including in the January 6, 2021, WildProtest rally).

Dispelling any possibility of the entry representing another “Mike Flynn,” the listing was linked to his 2016 CNP panel appearance.

Ginni Thomas is listed in the same CNP employee database, also as having an undisclosed staff role.

Flynn’s affiliations underscore a disturbing link between Trump’s team and the far-right conspiracy movement QAnon. On July 7, 2020, the CNN reported that Flynn had tweeted a video of himself taking an oath with a QAnon slogan, accompanied by a QAnon hashtag.

In the weeks following the election, Flynn [appeared](#) on a

December 4 Red State Talk Radio program called “In the Matrixx: General Flynn Digital Soldiers.” This was a term Flynn had [introduced](#) in a May 2016 speech, as a force to combat the “insurgency” created by the professional news media: “So the American people decided to take over the idea of information . . . and they did it through social media.” In his introduction, Matrixx host Jeffrey Pederson urged, “Patriots, join us in a Q army. Are you guys ready for some booms?” In a telephone interview, he congratulated Michael Flynn on his November 25 presidential pardon for lying to the FBI in the Russia investigation. “We are your digital soldiers, sir.”

Flynn replied, “The digital army that we have is unstoppable. . . . When I see people that don’t want to fight on the battlefield, the Twitter

space, the Facebook space, we don’t necessarily choose the terrain that we want to fight on, but when we get on that terrain, and we’re on it . . . we fight like digital soldiers, and we will overcome everything.”

When host Jeffrey Pederson complained that his program had been taken down from a number of major digital platforms, Flynn answered, “Digital Soldiers is gonna have a capability soon. . . . We need a new platform of truth, it’s gonna happen.”

Concerning “this disastrous election we’ve just had,” Flynn adhered to the CNP party line concentrating on state-level action. “We are going to win. We have to be patient, we have to persevere through this, we have to be committed to fight for the truth in these various swing states where the hearings have

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Wrong Mike Flynn?

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- Industry: Membership Organizations, Organizations

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- Bob McEwen, Executive Director
- Genevieve Cole, Director, Membership
- Mary Hathway, Director, Conferences
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been occurring. . . . For the people that are in those states, those affected states, you need to be calling your representatives, you need to be going to these rallies that they're having at the state capitals, and you need to be putting demands on your state officials, your state political class, to not accept this gross . . . this abuse of our election system."

On December 10, the CNP's Conservative Action Project [published](#) a letter stating, "There is no doubt President Donald J. Trump is the lawful winner of the presidential election." It stated that "state legislatures in the battleground states of Pennsylvania, Arizona, Georgia, Wisconsin, Nevada and Michigan should exercise their plenary power under the Constitution and appoint clean slates of electors to the Electoral College to support President Trump." It further called on conservative leaders and groups to implement the strategy discussed at the previous CNP meeting and pressure their state and national representatives to replace the electors. The letter was signed by over a dozen members of the CNP, including the president, the executive director, and executive committee member Jenny Beth Martin.

Over the course of November, Stop the Steal organizers had summoned their supporters to join a series of pro-Trump "Jericho Marches" and prayer vigils around the country. These [included](#) a "March for Trump" 20-city bus tour organized by Women for America First, one of Tea Party activist Amy Kremer's organizations, culminating in a December 12 rally in Washington D.C. Michael Flynn was a headliner for the event, and his speech was recorded by the Right Side Broadcasting Network and

posted on YouTube. Standing over a Women for America First podium before the Supreme Court, Flynn proclaimed, "We are not going to give up!" His words were met by chants of "Stop the Steal!" from the crowd—which included hundreds of Proud Boys and QAnon supporters in combat fatigues and paramilitary gear. Flynn [closed](#) his remarks with a blessing for the military, first responders, and the police. "They're fighting on the front lines of freedom right now—for us."

Legal efforts to overturn the election results continued, but counts and recounts of the ballots came up with the same results, and the challenges were dismissed by courts across the country. Trump's circle of trusted advisers was shrinking, and the president con-

sidered desperate measures.

On Friday, December 18, an extraordinary meeting took place in the White House with four participants who had not been

recorded on the official calendar, among them Michael Flynn and attorney Sidney Powell, both of whom had ties to the CNP. According to a February 6 account of that meeting in *The New York Times*, Sidney Powell proposed that Trump appoint her special counsel to investigate voter fraud, and Trump considered naming Flynn head of the FBI and chief of staff for the rest of his administration.

The previous day, December 17, the right-wing site *Newsmax* had posted an [interview](#) with Flynn.

"The president has to plan for every eventuality because we cannot allow this election and the integrity of our election to go the way it is," Flynn said. "This is just totally unsatisfactory. There's



no way in the world we're going to be able to move forward as a nation with this. . . . He could immediately on his order seize every single one of these machines around the country on his order. He could also order, within the swing states, if he wanted to, he could take military capabilities and he could place them in those states and basically rerun an election in each of those states. It's not unprecedented."

Now, in the White House meeting of December 18, witnesses reported that Powell and Flynn [urged](#) Trump to consider the National Emergencies Act and "extraordinary measures" to address the electoral outcome. Others in the meeting objected, and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy and Army Chief of Staff General James McConville quickly issued a [statement](#) saying, "There is no role for the U.S. military in determining the outcome of an American election."

As the options diminished, CNP members doubled down. On January 2, President Trump [held a conference call](#) with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, in which he famously ordered Raffensperger to "find" 11,780 votes—one more than Biden's margin of victory. The CNP's Cleta Mitchell, one of three lawyers on the call, was identified by White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows as one of the "attorneys that represent the president—who is not the attorney of record but has been involved [in the efforts to challenge the electoral results]." Mitchell [reinforced](#) Trump's false claims of fraud and pressed Raffensperger to hand over his investigations of the allegations.

Once again, the effort backfired. The Raffensperger call was leaked to the press, and the Georgia official was lauded as a champion of democracy for resisting Trump's bullying behavior. Mitchell [resigned](#) from her position at Foley and Lardner, based on the firm's policy that its attorneys would not represent "any parties seeking to contest the results of the election."

Trump's paths to victory were diminishing by the day. The next juncture was January 6, when Congress was scheduled to certify the Electoral College vote. Stop the Steal had been mobilizing for weeks, with the support of the president's Twitter feed.

The CNP connection surfaced on a number of fronts, as reflected in a chronology [published](#) by *The Washington Post*. On December 20, the domain "WildProtest" was registered. The *Post's* Philip Bump wrote, "It appears to be the brainchild of Ali Alexander" (the onetime CNP member and former Ali Akbar). On January 2, Amy Kremer of Women for America First tweeted, "We are excited to announce the site of our January 6 event will be the Ellipse in President's Park, just steps from the White

House!" Kremer appeared in the CNP's 2014 roster on the CNP board of governors, listed as chairman of the Tea Party Express. Her daughter Kylie Kremer took out the National Park Service [permit](#) for the "March for Trump," dated January 5, 2021.

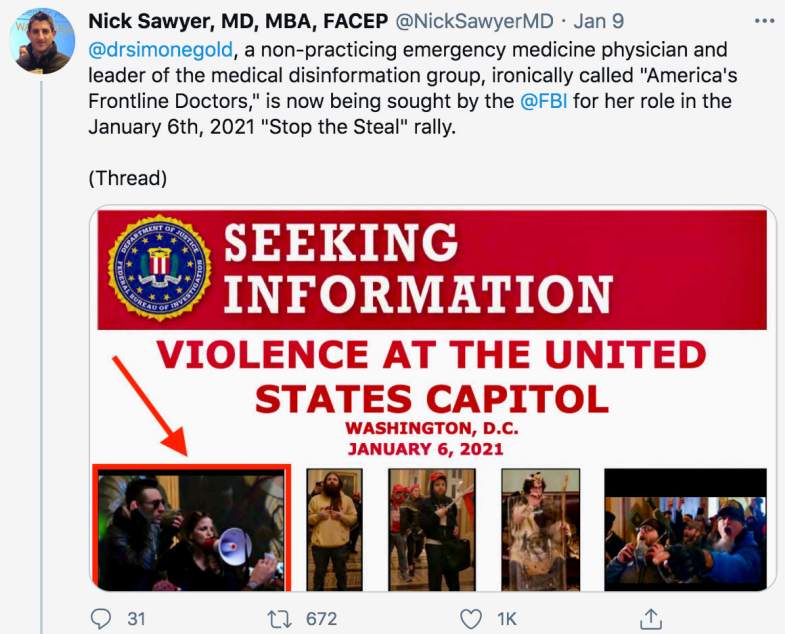
CNP affiliates took action on a local level. Two days before the protest, Charlie Kirk tweeted that his organizations were "sending 80-plus buses full of patriots to DC to fight for this president." (Kirk was indulging in hyperbole. Turning Point USA spokesman Andrew Kolvet later [confirmed](#) to Reuters that Kirk's organization, Turning Point Action, sent "seven buses carrying 350 students" to the rally, but added that the group "condemns political violence.") Another tweet from Turning Point Action [invited](#) protesters to "ride a bus & receive priority entry" and "stay in a complimentary hotel." Both tweets were deleted after January 6. In Lynchburg, Virginia, more

than 100 protesters [boarded](#) buses organized by Liberty Counsel Action, chaired by CNP board of governors member Mat Staver.

CNP member Ginni (Mrs. Clarence) Thomas [promoted](#) the protest on her Twitter feed on January 6, tweeting, "Watch MAGA crowd today best with Right Side Broadcasting (<https://rsbnetwork.com/>), and then C-Span for what the Congress does starting at 1:00 pm today. LOVE MAGA people!!!!"

On another front, CNP member Scott Magill, a retired military physician who had joined the hydroxychloroquine campaign, summoned "fellow Warriors and Friends" to the protest on behalf of his organization, Veterans in Defense of Liberty. Magill had [made a video presentation](#) to a 2017 CNP meeting, which was accessed by Brent Allpress, describing VIDOL as a national organization made up of "battalions" and "companies," formed to "identify and oppose all who would destroy our freedom, our Judeo-Christian values, our culture, or our morals." It was expanded, he said, to include a "cavalry division of Veteran motorcycle riders" that could function as a "peaceful rapid response team."

Jenny Beth Martin claimed a major role in the day's events. On December 30, she [tweeted](#), "I will be speaking at the #StoptheSteal rally on January 6. We must demand Congress to challenge the Electoral College votes and fight for President Trump!" She indicated that her protégé, Dr. Simone Gold (the mouthpiece for Covid misinformation), would be speaking as well. Martin's Tea Party Patriots were listed as one of the 11 participating organizations on the March to Save America website (along with Turning Point Action and Phyllis Schlafly



Eagles). The site [announced](#), “At 1:00 pm we will march on the US Capitol building to protest the certification of the Electoral College.” (The webpage included an automatic SMS opt-in and a Covid-19 disclaimer waiving any claims against the organizers for “illness or injury.”)

On Tuesday, January 5, Trump supporters [gathered](#) at Freedom Plaza in Washington for a Stop the Steal “pre-rally.” Ali Alexander led them in cries of “Victory or Death!” Michael Flynn told them, “We stand at a crucible moment in United States history,” and local CBS affiliate reporter Mike Valerio [tweeted](#) from the scene, “We’ve heard General Mike Flynn give a salute / shoutout to QAnon soldiers.”

On January 6, thousands of protesters converged on the Ellipse in Washington, D.C. President Trump addressed his followers in strident tones, urging them to “walk down to the Capitol,” “show strength,” and “demand that Congress do the right thing.” Then he departed for the White House to watch the day’s events on television.

The crowd moved toward the Capitol and invaded its halls, attacking Capitol police officers and vandalizing the premises. Simone Gold [reprise](#)d her speech in the Rotunda, condemning the Covid-19 vaccine as “an experimental biological agent deceptively named a vaccine.” Some members of the mob clutched Bibles and carried signs reading “Jesus Saves.” Americans were stunned by shocking images of men in paramilitary gear snaking up the Capitol steps, of the mob assaulting a prostrate police officer, of extremists brandishing zip-tie handcuffs in the Senate chamber.

On the Senate floor, Brent Bozell IV was [recorded](#) entering the chamber, speaking on a cell phone, then repositioning the C-SPAN camera to point at the floor. Bozell is the son of Brent Bozell III, a 30-year veteran of the CNP and a member of the executive committee.

In the aftermath of the attack, Charlie Kirk and other supporters of the protest deleted their tweets, but many had already been archived. Simone Gold expressed “regret” for her actions, but on January 18 she was arrested by the FBI on charges of violent entry and disorderly conduct. Gold’s sponsor, Jenny Beth Martin—who was scheduled to speak on January 5 but did not—[told](#) Robert O’Harrow of *The Washington Post* that her group had provided no financial support for the rally. “We were shocked, outraged, and saddened at the turn of events Wednesday afternoon,” she said.

On January 6, Brent Bozell III gave an interview to Fox Business describing the riot as “an explosion of pent-up outrage from Middle America.” He said, “Look, they are furious because they believe this election was stolen. . . . I agree with them.” He condemned the breaching of the Capitol, blaming it on “one element that went forward in lawlessness.” His son was [charged](#) with participating in the breach by the FBI 10 days later.

It will be months, if not years, before the details of the events in January will be fully revealed, including the identities of the organizers and underwriters and the role of the CNP.

Many additional threads require urgent examination, and this will demand the combined efforts of federal and congressional investigators, journalists, academics, and litigators. One is the mounting evidence of heavy QAnon involvement in the violence in the Capitol. The FBI has [noted](#) the wide display of “symbols associated with QAnon conspiracy theories” among the rioters, and QAnon followers are heavily represented among those arrested so far. The marchers on the Capitol also bore a number of Christian Nationalist symbols, including a wooden cross and a flag reading “Make America Godly Again.” Recently, there have been disturbing [reports](#) that QAnon has been aggressively targeting Midwestern evangelicals, including mainline Protestants, Southern Baptists, and Pentecostals. Pentecostals are a little-understood but growing force in American politics, particularly among African-American and Hispanic voters, and the CNP has been cultivating their leaders for years.

The CNP’s affiliates were by no means acting alone in attempting to overturn the results of the election, or in their support for the Capitol protest on January 6. The evidence shows various networks at work:

civilian and military, independent and intersecting, feckless and murderous.

What is irrefutable is that members of the CNP and their circle exerted their influence and manipulated their followers to support Trump’s lies about the stolen election and his effort to derail the electoral process. Many of these people emerged as key players in the efforts to disrupt America’s 220-year-old tradition of the peaceful transfer of power and stoked the fury of insurrectionists who desecrated American democracy on that fateful January afternoon. ■

Anne Nelson is the author of Shadow Network: Money, Media, and the Secret Hub of the Radical Right. Bloomsbury will publish a [new paperback edition](#) in May 2021. Nelson is the recipient of the Livingston Award for journalism and a Guggenheim Fellowship for historical research.

The FBI has noted the wide display of “symbols associated with QAnon conspiracy theories” among the rioters, and QAnon followers are heavily represented among those arrested so far.